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How Do You Feel Sad At Something You Never Saw?

Our *avodah* during the Nine Days involves certain actions we do, which eventually lead up to the day of *Tisha B'Av* – the very climax of our pain. There are outer actions we have to do according to *halachah*, but there is also an inner work to be done.

It is hard for us to imagine what it was like when we had a *Beis HaMikdash*. It is very far from our mind to comprehend, and it is hard as well even to imagine it. We are thus very far from feeling the pain of the destruction. How can we feel pain over something which we never saw, something which we can't even really imagine?

The *avodah* we have during the Nine Days is about feeling the pain [over the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash* and what we used to have, before we were placed into exile]. Pain involves our deep emotions. Thus, we need to try to awaken ourselves to cry about what happened during these days. But it is very difficult for many people to do so. People read the stories and the history of what happened during those times, yet it is still very hard for people to actually feel pain and to cry over the tragic period of our history.

We need to find a way to open ourselves up, so that we can feel the depth of the pain of the destruction. We will try here, with the help of Hashem, to draw these matters closer to our hearts, so we can come to feel the pain that we are supposed to feel; to feel how the *Shechinah* is in exile.

The Superficial Way To Feel Pain

There are two ways how a person can try to draw himself close to mourning over the destruction. One of them is not that effective, while the other way is more effective.

One way (mentioned above) is for a person to awaken himself, in a superficial manner, to get inspired. This can be done by reading the statements of Chazal about the destruction. For most people, however, this doesn't work, because it is hard to actually feel the pain of the destruction just by reading about the tragedies that went on. A person reads on and on about the many tragedies that Chazal say took place, yet he still doesn't feel that it has to do with him, and it doesn't get him to cry.

The Inner Way To Awaken Pain Over the Destruction

An alternative way, which is the way that will help us, is to awaken from within ourselves an internal kind of crying. Then we will be able to actually cry on our outside as well.

This is not accomplished through the usual inspiration that comes from outside of ourselves. We will explain.

All the *maalos* (qualities) which the soul can attain – such as *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven), *kedushah* (holiness), *taharah* (purity), etc. – are all desires of our soul to gain more and more levels in *ruchniyus* (spirituality). This is the universal desire of the Jewish people: to grow in our *ruchniyus*. But we must understand that inspiration alone will not suffice in order to accomplish this.

When the *Beis Hamikdash* was around, there was the *Shechinah* (Hashem's revealed Presence), and this enabled people to reach very high levels in their *ruchniyus*. The great spiritual light that existed then affected all people, even the simplest Jew. The Vilna Gaon writes that we have no comprehension of even the simplest Jew of those times.

If anyone thinks about this – not just intellectually, but as an internalization – he would really see what we are missing today. The desires that we have to grow in *ruchniyus*, and the frustrations that we each have in trying to grow, would not have existed had we lived in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*! It was so much easier to serve Hashem then! If we think about this and what this means for us, we would realize the true depth of the destruction.

All of our frustrations, and all of our various failures, are all a result of exile. Because we don't have the *Shechinah*, it is so much harder for us to serve Hashem. We have yearnings to serve Hashem, we really want to grow in Torah and mitzvos, and in all areas of our *ruchniyus* – but we have so much frustration in trying to succeed. This is all because we don't have the *Shechinah*.

If this doesn't bother a person, that's a different problem altogether. We are talking about someone who does realize it's a problem. If a person realizes what he's missing, he should go deeper into this reflection and what it means: If I would have the *Beis Hamikdash* in my life, I wouldn't have so many problems in my *ruchniyus*.

If a person thinks about this, he will be able to awaken the pain that he is supposed to have over the destruction. There is a lot to think about here: how far we are in our *ruchniyus*. How far we are from Torah, from Tefillah, from *Ahavas Yisrael*, from *shemiras einayim*, from *taharah*...and from all other areas we need to be better at.

Anyone who thinks about this – calmly, and in solitude (as the Chazon Ish writes to do) – will discover how painful this realization is, and this will bring a person to cry.

In Summary

The *avodah* during these days is to first contemplate this on at least an intellectual level, and then internalize it in our hearts: how much we are missing.

If we would have a *Beis Hamikdash*, our hearts would be different, our *daas* would be different, our *middos* would be different. Contemplate this, and you will realize how painful this discovery is. And if you merit, it might even bring you to tears.

This is how we can awaken ourselves to cry. Of course, this is not yet reaching the purpose of why we mourn. We are only saying how we can open ourselves up to feel the pain we are supposed to feel.

Most People Need This Approach

The true *Tisha B'Av* one is supposed to have is to feel the general painful situation of the Jewish people, but this is only reached by someone who has great *Ahavas Yisrael*. Most people, though, have not reached such a high level of *Ahavas Yisrael*, and therefore they find it hard to cry over the situation of our people today.

That being the case, practically speaking, most people will need to simply awaken from within themselves a personal reason to cry, such as by thinking about one's personal frustrations in areas of *ruchniyus*.

We can only cry over the loss of the *Shechinah* if we have already drawn ourselves close to the *Shechinah*, but most people aren't close to the *Shechinah*; therefore, it is hard for most people to relate to the concept of the "pain of the *Shechinah*." Therefore, most people need to simply open themselves up to cry: by thinking about their own private suffering, by thinking about how much we are missing from our own life.

The Higher Stage: Contemplating Another's Pain

Let us continue one step further, but first make sure that you are on the first level: first realize where you are in your *ruchniyus*. If your heart has been opened at least to this first level, you can continue to the next level we are about to say.

Think about the following. Who do you love on this world? Everyone has people whom they love on this world; who do you love the most on this world? Think about this, and now, think: Do you feel the pain of the person whom you love the most? Do you feel his physical pain? If you do, what about the things that bother him spiritually? Do you feel any pain, whatsoever, at his\her situation? If you do, now connect yourself to his\her pain. Then, think about the following? The pain that your beloved person has is all a result of the loss of the *Shechinah* on this world! This is because all of the pain in the world comes from the absence of *Shechinah*.

What If Someone Doesn't Care About Ruchniyus?

In the first stage we explained, we explained how a person should try to awaken his spiritual pain and frustration, so that he can awaken himself to the pain and mourning over the loss of the *Shechinah*. But what if someone's spiritual situation doesn't bother him that much? What can he do to awaken himself to tears over the loss of the *Shechinah*, if he doesn't care that much about his own *ruchniyus* in the first place?

He can at least think into his physical situation, and let himself be bothered by the things in his life that are not alright. Every person has things in his life that bother him. After all, who doesn't have hardship and difficulty on this world? Thinking about this can help a person open himself up to the idea of feeling pain, and now that he has brought the pain to the surface, he can remind himself that all of this pain is because we are in exile, because we don't have the *Shechinah*.

A person has to sit and think about these reflections during *Tisha B'Av*, so that he can open himself up to the idea of pain and mourning over the exile and the loss of the *Shechinah*. Besides for hearing *Eichah* and reciting *Kinnos* on *Tisha B'Av*, a person must make sure to actually make these reflections and awaken himself to feel some level of pain.

This self-introspection must be done privately. Simply think about what pains you in your life. Anyone is on the level of doing this. Then, after you remind yourself of the pain you have in your life, realize that all of your pain is rooted in the fact that we do not have a *Beis Hamikdash*, that we are missing the *Shechinah*. This will help you open yourself up to the concept of pain, and it will be a small opening for you to help you feel the real pain you are supposed to feel.

May we all merit to feel the pain of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and to be of those whom our Sages say, “Whoever mourns Jerusalem, will merit to see it in its rebuilding.”

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